MINISTERIAL SYMPOSIUM
ON THE FUTURE OF PUBLIC SERVICES
Paris, March 1996

ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT
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About this page:

The topics and proceedings of OECD's first ministerial level meeting on public management are discussed in a 48 page publication, which is now on line at this site. This page provides an overall guide to the publication, with hyperlinks to the text of the sections described.

If you would like to see the conventional Table of Contents, click here.

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Introduction:

"The success of OECD's first ministerial level meeting on public management showed that a coherent, strategic view of public management in Member countries was possible, and that many public management reform concepts are robust enough to apply reasonable well across the diverse political traditions and diverse cultures of OECD Member countries."

Click here to read the full text of the Introduction to the Symposium publication by the Secretary-General, Donald Johnston

Executive Summary:

Politics and the reform of governments: Ministers look at the future of public services. At the March, 1996, Ministerial Symposium on the Future of Public Services, Ministers from OECD countries who are responsible for public management came together for the first time. For one and one half days, they were challenged to discuss public management from the point of view of political leaders.

Click here to read the Executive Summary of the meeting.

Welcoming Statement

"The art of government has never been a simple one, and today it is perhaps becoming still more difficult. That is why OECD has concerned itself with public management"

Click here to read the welcoming statement by Jean-Claude Paye, former Secretary General of the OECD.

Click here to read the Statement by the Chair, Hon Alice M. Rivlin

left to right:
Jean-Claude Paye OECD, Secretary-General
Hon Alice M. Rivlin United States, Chair of the Symposium
Derry Ormond OECD, Head of the Public Management Service
Ministerial Symposium on the Future of Public Services

Symposium Session 1:

Changing the scope, role and structure of government

There are at least five reasons why the last decade has been a period of re-examination of the roles of government and how these roles are carried out: budgetary pressures; a lack of responsiveness to public demands; ineffective programmes; the need to compete in the world economy; and the internationalisation of many issues that previously were predominantly domestic concerns.

Session 1 Issues:

- How should politicians respond when programmes are unsuccessful, or when civil service managers make mistakes?
- How successfully do independent agencies, semi-autonomous bodies or newly privatised entities respond to the needs of citizens?
- How responsive are they to changes in national policy?
- Is it possible to delegate responsibilities for managing public services and also maintain equity?
- How does a senior political official reconcile delegation with his role in responding to important groups and institutions in society?

Click here to read about Session 1

Symposium Session 2:

A context of evolving relationships: The media, information technology, interest groups and democratic accountability

Ministers attending the Symposium work in countries with different political and administrative systems, and there are other features specific to each country. Nevertheless, their discussions revealed there are similar trends in the context in which the public services of Member countries operate.

Session 2 Issues:

- As consultation and citizen involvement in decision-making increases, how can the right to influence be balanced against obstructionism?
- In dealing with such problems as illegal immigration, tax evasion, and drug abuse, how can governments resolve conflicts between their role as enforcer of legitimate laws and regulations, and their role as protector of human rights?
- Can government use information technology effectively and also protect privacy?

Click here to read about Session 2

Symposium Session 3:
Managing for the future: Seeking solutions to long-range problems in a world that demands immediate action

One of the most common criticisms of democratic government in OECD Member countries is that the political system yields to the pressure to choose short-term benefits over long-term solutions to problems.

**Session 3 Issues:**

- Can Member countries more effectively incorporate long-range considerations into at least the analysis of budgetary issues, if not the political decision-making process? Can strategic planning, which is becoming a more common requirement for departments and agencies, enhance the visibility of longer-range issues at the political level?
- Can the population at large become a more effective force in creating pressure for a longer-range perspective?
- Is there a need to improve budget decision systems so that they reflect the long-range value of investments in public works and human capital?
- Should Member countries establish rules or laws to ensure that fiscal decisions take into account longer-range concerns?

Click here to read about Session 3

**Possibilities thinking:**

In addition to the three topics listed above, the ministers discussed a statement prepared specifically for the Symposium on the outlook for the future of governance entitled "Uncertainty is the Price of Freedom." The Secretary-General introduced the discussion with a Challenge to the Ministers.

To read the Secretary-General's Challenge, click here
To read the text of this statement, and some comments by ministers, click here and
To find out who prepared the statement, click here

**What Do We Mean?** The terms government, governance, and public management are often used, but their meaning is not always clear.

Click here to find out how they were defined for the Symposium.

For a Glossary of public management, click here.

**People Who Helped:** The Symposium was designed to provide Ministers with an unconstrained, off-the-record forum for discussion. However, each session was summarised by an invited expert
so as to provide Member countries with a tangible product of the Symposium. These summaries have been relied on extensively in the preparation of this document, and the assistance of the experts is gratefully acknowledged.

Topic 1: Jack Waterford, Editor, The Canberra Times, Australia
Topic 2: Bernard Pêcheur, Maître de Requêtes, Conseil d’Etat, France
Topic 3: Jodie Allen, Editor, The Washington Post, Outlook Section, United States